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A Professor praises a young girl's letter

I wish to thank you for publishing the letter "Mass Suicide" in the July 26th edition. I am a visiting professor of English, from Canada, and have frequently complained about things American since my return here this summer. Now I must say that I was moved and heartened by the letter from Christien Browne, a letter which revealed amazing sensitivity and intelligence. Would that the adults around us cared as much or could think so clearly.

The situation in Viet Nam worsens daily. The American government and especially, one presumes, the President, the State Department and the C.I.A. insist on presenting the conflict in ideological terms. There has been a persistent refusal in recent years to acknowledge the popular base of revolutions in countries like Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Viet Nam and China. This is particularly ironic in view of America's birth from revolution. The British might well have charged during the war for independence that the rebellion was led by Communists, had the charge been available to them. The war in Viet Nam is between well-fed people and hungry people. It is, moreover, a war for self-determination, and the current slaughter, hunger and disease and the consequent despair of the Vietnamese are the best allies communism has.

It is not possible to imagine what kind of "victory" is possible in such a war. Annihilation may very well be its ultimate and logical outcome.

What astonishes an outsider like myself (though most Americans seem totally complacent about it) is the tone of indignation and surprise at the idea of an American bomber being shot down by a North Vietnamese missile. It seems to be expected that the current bombing of a foreign, self-governed power should be carried out without retaliation or even defense and that Hanoi is not playing the game when it shoots down attacking planes. How incredible! This is, I readily confess, a state of mind I cannot fathom.

The worst aspect of the current conflict in Viet Nam and of American foreign "policy" (to give it a flattering title) in general is what I would call the programmed deceit of the American people. They are not seen to be fit to understand the complexities of their world, as are their elected officers; they are lied to, as in the Bay of Pigs incident and the Dominican invasion; and they are currently being duped into accepting an escalation of the Viet Nam war by the use of stages of involvement. This is a system whereby the President voices America's desires for peace while increasing the military build-up so that it becomes increasingly difficult to extricate the combatants.

All the current national and international conflicts are between the haves and have-nots. No amount of political double-talk and no veneer of ideological jargon can obscure that basic issue. The



Escalators

—Robinson, Indianapolis News

have-nots cannot be kept from their natural aspirations for comfort, security and dignity. We can either support that struggle and win respect, not only from our fellowmen, but more importantly from ourselves, or we can repress it and lend support to unpopular dictators and a small wealthy class, in which case we will lose, not only the conflict but our self-respect. I believe this issue faces Americans today more than it faces others. It is a choice they must make and make rightly or they will witness the disintegration of civilization. Can Americans be informed, responsible, vocal, generous and humane? As Walter Lippmann has said it is late, very late, but not too late. How much longer do we have?

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